

VZCZCXRO0728
RR RUEHGR
DE RUEHGE #0324/01 0892056
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 302056Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4984
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GEORGETOWN 000324

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: Cuban Doctors Fearful in Guyana

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Post has interviewed six applicants for significant public benefit parole (SPBP) under the Cuban Medical Personnel program. Five came to Guyana as conscripted members of the Cuban medical brigade. As they await a decision on their applications, some of these doctors fear that Cuban Embassy officials or Guyanese police will find them to deport them back to Cuba. One is already experiencing repercussions and informed the ConOff of recent changes to the medical brigade program as a direct result of the SPBP program. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Embassy Georgetown Consular Officers have interviewed six Cuban doctors who applied for significant public benefit parole (SPBP) under the Cuban Medical Personnel program. Of the six applicants, one doctor has been granted parole and departed for the U.S. Two have legal status in Guyana (one married a Guyanese woman, another came to Guyana independently). The three remaining applicants completed the medical brigade program and remained in Guyana without legal status. These "illegals" fear that Cuban Embassy officials or Guyanese police will find them to deport them back to Cuba.

¶3. (SBU) The most recent applicant speculates that someone must have informed the Cuban authorities he visited the U.S. Embassy to request parole. The Cuban Embassy assigned him to accompany an "ill" Cuban doctor that had to return to Cuba. The applicant refused to board the plane because of a hunch that he was being tricked into repatriating himself. Subsequently, Cuban Embassy authorities told him that his passport would be canceled immediately. They also removed him from the medical brigade and labeled him a deserter.

¶4. (SBU) The most recent applicant also informed ConOff of recent changes to the medical brigade program as a direct result of the SPBP program. He stated that the Cuban Medical Brigade program sent a new manager to Guyana in December 2006 whose mandate is to crack down on Cuban medical personnel that have intentions to request parole or flee Guyana. Cuban medical personnel who apply for parole are ostracized. Any Cuban medical professional who maintains communication with parole applicants is at risk of losing his/her legal status in Guyana and job with the medical brigade.

¶5. (SBU) The Cuban doctor who was approved for parole was hesitant to travel because he feared for the safety of his female colleagues whose applications are still pending. Three of the pending applicants are in hiding, reporting that they cannot move freely for fear that Guyanese police or Cuban embassy personnel may apprehend them and repatriate them to Cuba. All of the parole applicants expect their families in Cuba to be targeted for reprisals because of their failure to return to Cuba after the completion of their mission.

¶6. (SBU) During their interviews, three of the Cuban applicants explained to the ConOff that upon arrival in Guyana, medical personnel are forced to surrender their passports to the Cuban

Embassy. Their passports are returned to them just as they are about to board the plane to return to Cuba after completing their two years of service. The applicants that came to the Embassy with their passports risked arrest by fleeing from the airport rather than returning to Cuba. They reported that "official-looking" people chased them as they ran to a taxi and drove away from the airport. They went into hiding until they felt safe enough to come to the U.S. Embassy to file an application for parole.

¶7. (U) Cuban medical personnel have meager funds available on which to subsist. They receive very low wages compared to their Guyanese counterparts, and their contracts require them to relinquish fifty percent of any overtime pay to the Central Unit for Medical Cooperation (UCCM) in Havana. The Cuban doctor's monthly salary is equivalent to US\$500 from which US\$100 is deducted on a monthly basis and contractually remitted back to the UCCM. Overtime is accumulated at the rate of US\$1.25 per hour, and doctors on the overnight shift make US\$2.50 per night. In comparison, Guyanese doctors typically make US\$1,500 per month. The final renewal of the doctor's visas is done six months prior to the conclusion of their medical mission so that the termination of their legal status will coincide with their repatriation to Cuba.

¶8. (U) Applicants regularly call consular section for a status update on their parole applications. Post is unable to offer them much information other than that they must wait until DHS renders a decision. Local charities can offer very little assistance to political refugees. Moreover, every time the applicants have to leave their hiding place to ask for assistance, they risk detention and deportation because of their lack of status. Presently, they rely on the assistance that some former colleagues are willing to give them at much risk to their own status.

¶9. (SBU) COMMENT: Cuban applicants for SPBP tell us the only reason Post does not receive many more parole applications is that

GEORGETOWN 00000324 002 OF 002

applicants are terrified of being seen entering the U.S. Embassy. ConOffs sense that Cuban medical personnel are willing to take the risk of requesting parole; however once they do, they are faced with months of delay and uncertainty. Since many applicants are requesting parole after they have completed the medical mission, they are no longer legally employed and unable to subsist on their meager savings while awaiting a decision from DHS that can take months to process. END COMMENT.

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